DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 242 366 JC 840 156

AUTHOR Bazik, Martha S.
TITLE Strategic Planning and the Non-Credit Unit: A Model.
INSTITUTION Moraine Valley Community Coll., Palos Hills, IL. Center for Community and Continuing Education.
PUB DATE [84]
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Planning; *Continuing Education; Educational Trends; *Long Range Planning; *Noncredit Courses; Organizational Objectives; Postsecondary Education
IDENTIFIERS *Strategic Planning

ABSTRACT

Colleges' non-credit units, with their capacity for perceiving and responding to diverse educational needs, experience in successfully serving non-traditional student populations, effective marketing strategies, and freedom from cumbersome approval processes, are in a position to be a valuable resource to colleges facing rapid change and unprecedented challenges. However, a systematic approach to dealing with these challenges is required in order to maximize the impact of the non-credit unit on the institution. A strategic plan can provide the vehicle for such a systematic approach to decision making and implementation. At the heart of the strategic planning model are the following components: (1) the development of a planning attitude by all participants involved in the planning process; (2) a thorough analysis of all activities of the unit for which plans are being made; (3) an analysis of all of the external forces which affect the unit's activities; (4) a mechanism for forecasting trends; (5) planning sessions during which goals and objectives can be determined and additional sessions during which operational plans can be generated based on goals and objectives; (6) a timetable which will allow for the continuous evaluation of progress in fulfilling plans; and (7) follow-up sessions during which goals are evaluated and revised as necessary. (LAL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
✓ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
F. Gaskin
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED242366

JC 840 156

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND THE NON-CREDIT UNIT
A Model

by
Martha S. Bazik, Ph.D., Dean
The Center for Community and Continuing Education
Moraine Valley Community College
Palos Hills, Illinois

Today, as never before, higher education is being faced with unprecedented challenges which have implications for its very survival. Increased competition from other education service providers, rapid changes in contemporary technology, decline in revenues, emerging new markets for educational products, phenomenal expansion of information and sources of information and increased demand for strategies to cope with rapid changes and uncertain times are all important issues which will have to be addressed by post-secondary institutions.

Most colleges and universities have the potential for an ideal mechanism by which they can respond to the challenges of the 80's in their non-credit unit. First, this division has the capability of perceiving diverse educational needs of new publics and continuously responding to them. Non-credit personnel are generally scanning the internal and external environments, assessing needs, identifying resources and subject matter for educational activities. Second, it has experience in dealing successfully with the "non-traditional" student of the past who is rapidly becoming the "traditional" student of the present and future. Returning women, senior citizens, the

older worker, etc. are the emerging populations which non-credit units have been serving for years. Third, non-credit units have developed marketing strategies outside of the traditional admissions and recruitment systems by which the institution can compete more effectively with the other educational service providers. Fourth, the non-credit unit is relatively free of the cumbersome approval processes which are requisite when offering courses for credit. Educational products can be generated within a relatively short time span. This is a very important consideration as rapid changes in technologies require equally rapid responses from educational service providers.

Non-credit units are in a position to be a valuable resource in the institutional quest to remain vital in the future. A disorganized, haphazard response to these challenges will not suffice. Rather, thoughtful consideration of the issues and a systematic approach to dealing with them are required in order to maximize the impact of the non-credit unit on the institution.

Every non-credit division needs a strategic plan. Non-credit administrators no longer have a choice. They must anticipate the future and make enlightened decisions based upon the results of forecasting and an analysis of present conditions. A strategic plan can provide the vehicle for a systematic approach to decision making and implementation. Unfortunately, past experience with strategic planning or planning by any other name has frequently been an exercise in futility. Elaborate plans are frequently formulated only to end up on the shelf or in a drawer never to be consulted. Baldridge and Okimi in a recent study of colleges and universities found considerable disillusionment among administrators with the planning process. Participants in their surveys dubbed strategic planning as "meaningless" and a "waste of time."[1]

Some of the pitfalls of strategic planning designs which contribute to this indictment were identified as:

1. The lack of adequate information or pre-planning research upon which to base plans.
2. The lack of participation in the planning process by those entrusted with implementing the plans.
3. The lack of a mechanism built in to the planning process to anticipate the future or make future projections.
4. The lack of a mechanism built into the planning process for periodic review and updating of the strategic plan.
5. The formulation of plans which have no bearing to the reality of the situation.

All of these criticisms are justifiable and serve to illustrate the gap which frequently exists between the design of the planning model and its implementation. Where the breakdown occurs is not clear. From the literature, it appears that in theory, at least, all the component parts of good planning have been identified. Planning definitions abound and are all strikingly similar. (For example of this, see Peterson[2], 1981, Cosand[3], 1981, Fenske[4].)

Peter Drucker defines strategic planning as:

> The continuous process of making present entrepreneurial decisions systematically and with the greatest knowledge of their futurity; organizing systematically the efforts needed to carry out these desicions; and measuring the results of these decisions against the expectations through organized systematic feedback.

Baldridge and Okimi offer the following description of a good planning administrator or which is consistent with Drucker's planning definition:

> Planning models are clear about how administrators ought to behave. A good administrator should be oriented to long-range matters, not just crises; he or she should set clear, crisp goals, organize efforts so that goals are accomplished and evaluated, and should be "rational" in assessing the relevant facts. Long-term, deliberate behavior is the ideal (p. 15).

While the planning definitions and the literature which elaborate the process are theoretically sound, it is apparent that planning systems frequently are not implemented successfully. It is possible that too much emphasis is placed upon the production of a written document containing the goals and objectives. With the achievement of this, the formal planning process is terminated. After all, it is quite fashionable and simple to demonstrate ones commitment to planning by whipping out the annual goals and objectives statement. No institution should be without one.

While planning theory makes accommodations for the pre- and post formulation of goals stages, they are often overlooked or neglected. Unlike state of goals and objectives the results of these stages can not be neatly encased in an impressive document for public display. There is no way in which the fruits of them can be instantly signed, sealed, and delivered. The rewards may require months or even years to achieve . The revitilization of an organization resulting from the implementation of a fully integrated strategic planning system will not happen overnight. In a society where instant gratification is essential, years or even months are frequently too long to wait.

The purpose of this paper is to propose a planning model for non-credit units relatively simple but does produce results. It has been developed over a period of five years of experimentation. At the heart of the model is the following definition .

Strategic planning is that process which provides for:

1. The development of a planning attitude by all participants involved in the planning process.
2. A thorough analysis of all activities of the unit for which the plans are being made.
3. A thorough analysis of all external forces which affect the activities of the unit.
4. A mechanism by which future trends can be forecast.
5. Planning sessions during which goals and objectives can be determined.
6. Planning sessions during which operational plans can be generated based on the goals and objectives.
7. A timetable which will allow for continuous evaluation of progress in fulfilling plans.
8. Follow-up sessions where goals are evaluated and revised as necessary.

Development of the Planning Attitude

The key element and the foundation of this strategic planning model is development of a "planning attitude." The planning attitude is defined as the feeling of respect for the importance of and commitment to the planning process. This attitude is best fostered in a system of participatory management. Within the unit all individuals who are charged with the implementation

of the plans should be invited to participate in their formulation.

Initially all participants need to meet and explore the planning process. A good understanding of it is essential if respect for commitment to planning is to be fostered. Discussion of strategic planning theory as well as of the attitudes and feelings of the group toward planning should be included in the exploration. Both positive and negative experiences with prior efforts need to be freely examined. Special attention must be given to the examples of planning failures in order to provide the group the opportunity to discuss methods of avoiding these pitfalls in their own efforts. From initial discussions a design should be generated. All participants need to examine this model to ascertain the feasibility of its implementation within his or her own area of operation. If the design appears to be workable then the implementation stage begins.

While this approach to the process is time consuming, a sufficient interval needs to be alloted to ensure that the participants in the group understand planning theories in general. In addition, it is important they had the opportunity to generate a planning system which is tailored to the needs of the unit and into which safeguards have been built to prevent the process from being an exercise in futility. By going through these initial stages rather than imposing a system from the top, a greater commitment to and respect for the process will result.

Analysis of Activities

An integral part of the planning attitude should be the recognition that the formulation of future goals be made in the context of what currently exist. Participants need to examine all activity within their area of responsibility. While this process should be continuous and ongoing, initially the leader of the unit may have to motivate the analysis by requiring that a formal study of each area be made prior to goal setting sessions. Eventually this analysis will become second nature and integrated into daily operations as are other aspects of program planning and development.

The analysis of operation should focus upon such aspects as resource management, productivity of existing products, viability of marketing techniques, working relations with other areas within the unit and the institution, fiscal responsibility, etc. This analysis should generate both qualitative and quantative data. In addition, conclusions about the future of one's area of responsibility based upon the date collected should be drawn. The results of this analysis should be shared at formal goal setting sessions. As an integral part of the planning attitude, the analysis of activity does not stop immediately after the goal setting session but it is ongoing. Once goals have been formulated, they should be consulted frequently to determine whether the division's activity is in concert with the goals which have been written.

Analysis of Environment External to the Unit

Another integral part of the planning attitude is the recognition of the need to continuously analyze the environment external to the unit. The division exists with the institution. Plans need to be developed within the

context of institutional priorities and mission. The best goals generated will come to naught if there is no institutional support for them. All planners need to familiarize themselves with any written documents which deal with these priorities. In addition, they need to monitor the environment to determine whether the formal statements are, indeed, being implemented or whether these have been superceded by some informal unwritten policy. The type of information gleaned from this environmental scanning is essential to the planning processes.

A thorough analysis of the environment external to the institution is also essential. This is true for the non-credit unit which is dependent upon members of this environment for its survival. Products generated in a vacuum without a understanding of the marketplace may not be well received. Like the analysis of operational data, this aspect of the planning process may have to be initially motivated by the head of the unit. This can be accomplished by the assignment of certain exercises geared toward fostering this analysis. Eventually, it needs to become integrated into the process so that it is continuous and ongoing. It should not cease as soon as a set of goals have been developed.

Developing a Mechanism to Forecast Trends

To forecast future educational trends is not always easy, especially in an era of rapid changes and uncertain times. Non-credit administrators need to be future oriented. The head of such units must have a mechanism in place which will foster future thinking. This mechanism should provide for a method of gathering information on future trends. Part of the unit's professional library should be materials related to futuristic thinking. Where

budgets allow, staff should be encouraged to attend conferences or professional development seminars which deal with future trends. In addition, a mechanism should allow the group to discuss the information gained from reading and attending conferences and to examine the implications of it for the future of the unit. Finally, the mechanism should include a system by which this information can be translated into educational products.

Planning Sessions

While the first four components of the planning definition are continuous and ongoing processes, a formal planning session should be held once year. Initially the session should be deferred until the first four components have been implemented. At this planning session all the data gleaned from the internal and external analysis should be considered as well as any future projections which have been derived. In addition, the statement of institutional goals, mission, and philosophy should be on hand as reference material. During this session a formal statement of goals should be generated. When formulating goals, care should be taken to assure that they are clearly stated and can be translated into measurable objectives. Also, the planning group should always be cognizant of the expectation that the future development of the unit will be guided in a systematic way within the context of the goals formulated. While the planning processes do not end with the formulation of goals, this activity should be viewed as the culmination of all the other planning activities.

Developing the Operational Plans

The formulation of a goals statement does not signify the end of the planning process. It is frequently at this critical stage where planning efforts either succeed or fail. Goals statements alone are useless unless they are accompanied by a plan of action which provides for their attainment. After the formal goal setting session, planners should individually identify objectives which would allow them to achieve the goals within their area of responsibility. The accomplishment of these objectives would then be outlined in greater detail as each member of the planning group devises an operational plan which will ensure attainment of the objectives. The importance of this component to the system cannot be minimized. It is critical to its success. It ensures that the growth and future development of the unit will be focused and strong and not allowed to be diluted by wandering aimlessly along divergent paths. This frequently occurs when goal statements have been formulated but no attention is given to the development objectives and operational plans based upon them.

Evaluation Timetable

Once the operational plans to have been drawn and are in the implementation state, it is necessary to construct a timetable which designates times at which the operational plans should be checked in light of the objectives and the objectives in light of fulfilling the goals. These evaluations not only provide the opportunity for the planners to monitor the progress of the operation in the context of the goals but, also, it provides the opportunity to check the validity of the goals. It is possible that at these checkpoints a goal may be demonstrated to be unrealistic or perhaps not one which really

is best suited to guide the growth of the operation. When checkpoints are consciously built into the process, problems with the plan can be discovered and the appropriate changes made without having to wait until the next planning cycle.

Follow-Up Sessions

Almost as important as the formal goal setting sessions are the follow-up sessions where the group meets and reviews the goals and objectives. One session about midway through the planning year would be sufficient unless the periodic evaluation of the goals and operations by the participants indicates that there are serious problems with the goals formulated. At these sessions all members of the planning group share their observations based upon the evaluations of their area of operations. At this time any new information relative to the institutional environment or the external environment is introduced and any new future projections are noted. The goals are reviewed in light of all of this information and are adjusted accordingly.

Final Comments

There are no shortcuts to strategic planning All of the components outlined above need to be incorporated into the process. Once the system is put in place, it has no beginning or end but, instead, is cyclic in nature. There should be no abrupt, uncertain, or awkward movements. Rather, all aspects flow effortlessly one into the other converging, emerging, and diverging, controlled by the planning attitude.

The planning attitude is the essence of the model. So important is it that great care should be taken initially to its development within each participant. While this may delay the initiation of the process, it is worthwhile.

Each planner needs to understand the planning concept and internalize it to the extent that the activities requisite to successful implementation are undertaken automatically in the same manner as in eating or sleeping. There is no mystery to strategic planning and once it has been successfully integrated in the life of a unit, it should be woven effortlessly into the entire fabric of the operation.

The rewards of good planning are obvious. With so much uncertainty and monumental challenges facing higher education today, there needs to exist within our operations, a systematic way of analyzing these forces and dealing with them. The strength of a unit can easily be diluted as members of it run off in divergent directions attempting to react to the multitude of stimuli which bombard it. This "apply a band-aid" approach to the operation may only serve to illustrate that we don't have enough band-aids to effect solutions nor people to apply them. So the patient dies.

The strength of the division needs to be identified through careful study. Once identified, a clear sense of direction should be charted through the setting to goals and objectives. As the strenghts of individual members are united by a clear sense of direction and purpose, a strong and productive unit will result.

NOTES

1 Victor Baldridge and Patricia H. Okimi, "Strategic Planning in Higher Education: New Tool Or New Gimmick," AAHE Bulletin, (October 1982) p. 15-18.

2 Marvin Peterson, "Analyzing Alternative Approaches to Planning," Improving Academic Management, Jossey, Bass (San Francisco) 1980, p. 113-163.

3 Josepn Cosand, "Developing an Institutional Master Plan," Improving Academic Management, Jossey, Bass (San Francisco) 1980, p. 164-176.

4 Robert Fensek, "Setting Institutional Goals and Objectives," Improving Academic Management, Jossey, Bass (San Francisco), 1980, p. 177-199.

5 Pete Drucker, Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices, Harper and Row (New York) 1974, p. 125.

ERIC® CLEARINGHOUSE FOR JUNIOR COLLEGES
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

MAY 04 1984

8118 Math-Sciences Building
Los Angeles, California 90024